

News Release  
U.S. Department of Justice  
United States Attorney  
District of Rhode Island

May 3, 2005



## **Felon pleads guilty to firearms offense**

\*\*\*

**When arrested, the defendant asked, "Am I going federal?"**

**Shah McKenney**, of Providence, has pleaded guilty to being a felon in possession of a firearm, admitting that there was a gun in his car when Providence Police stopped it in December. McKenney attempted to flee from arrest but was apprehended and asked officers, "Am I going federal?" – an apparent reference to Project Safe Neighborhoods, a law enforcement collaboration that emphasizes federal prosecution of gun offenders.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the guilty plea, which McKenney entered yesterday before Chief U.S. District Court Judge Ernest C. Torres in U.S. District Court, Providence.

At the plea hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Gerard B. Sullivan said that, had the case gone to trial, the government would have proven that, on December 22, Providence Police Officers Thomas Zincone and Dennis O'Brien saw McKenney driving a car on Douglas Avenue. Knowing that McKenney did not have a driver's license, and after determining that the car's license plate had been reported stolen, they followed the car into the parking lot of a gas station.

McKenney tried to flee, first in the car and then on foot but officers caught him, whereupon he screamed several times, "Am I going federal?" That remark tipped the officers off

-more-

to the presence of a gun, which they found in the passenger compartment of the car that McKenney had been driving. McKenney later admitted that the gun, a loaded, .45 caliber revolver, was his and said he'd bought it on the street for \$150.

"This defendant's fear of 'going federal' shows that the message of Project Safe Neighborhoods is on the street," U.S. Attorney Corrente said. "Felons who have guns will be prosecuted federally, they will go to prison for a long time, and to prisons a long way from home."

The statutory maximum penalty for being a felon in possession of a firearm is ten years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine. McKenney, 26, of 7 Ledge Street, has prior convictions for a variety of offenses, including drug trafficking, and has been arrested 14 times as an adult.

**Providence Police** and the **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives** investigated the case. **Project Safe Neighborhoods** is a Department of Justice initiative against gun crimes. Under Project Safe Neighborhoods, the U.S. Attorney's Office, working with Providence Police, ATF, the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office, and other agencies, aggressively prosecutes federal firearms offenses in an effort to incarcerate those responsible for gun violence and deter others from committing gun crimes. Since 2001, federal firearms prosecutions in Rhode Island have more than doubled and gun offenders have been sentenced to a total of more than 600 years in federal prison.

-30-